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United States Department of Agriculture

PRODUCTION AND MARKETING ADMINISTRATION

SERVICE AND REGULATORY ANNOUNCEMENTS NO. 99¹OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES
OF CARCASS BEEF

The following is a reprint of the official United States standards for the grades of carcass beef heretofore promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture, pursuant to provisions in the acts of Congress entitled "An Act making appropriations for the Department of Agriculture" for the fiscal years 1926, 1940, and 1942. The standards are reprinted as amended.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STANDARDS

The tentative U. S. standards for the Grades of Dressed Beef were formulated in 1916. They provided the basis for uniformly reporting the dressed beef markets according to grades, which work was inaugurated as a national service early in 1917. The grade specifications were improved from time to time as experience gained through their use indicated what changes were necessary. They were published first in mimeographed form in June 1923. After slight changes they were included in Department Bulletin No. 1246 "Market Classes and Grades of Dressed Beef" which was published in August 1924.

Public hearings were held at Portland, Oreg., Chicago, Ill., and New York City, N. Y., in 1925 to give producers, slaughterers, wholesale and retail meat dealers, agricultural college workers, and others interested in the marketing of livestock and meat an opportunity to make suggestions for improving the standards. The sentiment registered at those meetings was overwhelmingly in favor of the grades as presented. The few suggestions and criticisms offered were carefully considered in subsequent revisions of the standards.

The tentative standards, although designed primarily for meat market reporting purposes, were put to further practical test in numerous ways. During the first World War they were used in the selection of beef for the Army, Navy, and Allies. Later they were included in the specifications of the Emergency Fleet Corporation for the purchase of its beef supplies. Soon thereafter they were incorporated in the specifications of many commercial concerns, including steamship lines, restaurants, hotels, dining-car services, and hospitals.

The revised grade descriptions were promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture, June 3, 1926, as the Official United States Standards for the Grades of Carcass Beef and published in Service and Regulatory Announcements No. 99 (B. A. E.).

These standards provided the basis for grading when the voluntary beef grading and stamping service was begun in May 1927.

The official standards were amended in July 1939 (Amendment No. 1 to S. R. A. No. 99) so as to provide a single standard for the grading and labeling of steer, heifer, and cow beef according to similar inherent quality characteristics. The amendment also changed certain grade terms for steer, heifer, and cow beef from "Medium," "Common," and "Low Cutter" to "Commercial," "Utility," and "Canner" respectively. A second amendment (Amendment No. 2 to S. R. A. No. 99) issued in November 1941, made similar changes in the grade terms for bull and stag beef and established the following grade terminology for all beef: Prime,² Choice, Good, Commercial, Utility, Cutter, and Canner.

¹ This announcement was issued originally as Service and Regulatory Announcements No. 99 of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The work on which it is based is now a part of the Production and Marketing Administration.

² The use of the grade specified as "Prime" for beef carcasses and wholesale cuts was suspended for the period September 18, 1942 to December 3, 1946, pursuant to amendment 5, Maximum Price Regulation 169 of the Office of Price Administration. During that period all carcass beef and wholesale cuts that met the specifications of the "Prime" grade were identified with and graded as "Choice."

APPLICATION OF STANDARDS

The standards as amended permit the grading and stamping of beef from steers, heifers, and cows according to its characteristics as beef without sex identification. Such beef placed within each respective grade, therefore, shall possess the characteristics specified for that grade, irrespective of the sex of the animal from which it was derived.

Beef produced from bulls and stags shall be graded according to its characteristics as bull beef and as stag beef in accordance with the grade standards herein set forth and designated for bull-beef carcasses and for stag-beef carcasses, respectively. When graded and identified according to grade, such beef shall be identified also for class as "Bull" beef or "Stag" beef as the case may be. No designated grade of bull beef or of stag beef is comparable in quality with a similarly designated grade of beef derived from steers, heifers, or cows. Neither is the quality in a designated grade of bull beef comparable with a similarly designated quality of stag beef.

The following standards for grades apply to beef from cattle that are beyond the calf stage but are of approximately average market age. It is recognized also that the degrees of finish and marbling, as well as of other characteristics, relate to some extent to the age of the animal from which the beef was produced. For instance, somewhat less finish and less extensive marbling than those specified in the grade descriptions are permitted in beef of each respective grade produced from young cattle, provided the degree of perfection in conformation and in the character of the lean and fat in such beef meets the requirements for the grade. Likewise, somewhat more finish and more extensive marbling in the lean than those specified are required in beef produced from older cattle. Consideration should be given to the weight of a beef carcass and to its evident degree of maturity when evaluating the influence of the degrees of finish and marbling on its grade.

All carcass beef and beef cuts possess each of the three grade characteristics or factors—quality, finish, and conformation—in varying degrees. A range of variation with respect to each of the three grade factors is therefore included within each grade. The standards are intended to describe only the characteristics of carcass beef and of wholesale beef cuts that are representative of the midpoint of each grade. It is recognized that there will be included within the limits of each grade, carcasses and cuts that are either superior or inferior to those described as representative of the grade. Grade is determined on the basis of a composite evaluation of these three factors, and a carcass or cut of beef placed within any grade may possess some characteristics that are like those in another grade but the total of its inherent characteristics or properties determines the grade into which it should be placed.

The following grade descriptions are defined primarily in terms of carcass beef. They are applicable also to wholesale cuts. It is recognized, however, that some of the wholesale cuts produced from a carcass which may be near the limits of the grade may not be of the same grade as that of the carcass from which they were produced. An evaluation of the degrees of quality, finish, and conformation shall determine the correct grade for such wholesale cuts.

STANDARD GRADES FOR CARCASS BEEF

There are seven grades for beef from steers and heifers, five grades for beef from cows, and six grades for beef from bulls and stags. These are listed in the following schedule of grades.

SCHEDULE—Standard market classes and grades for dressed beef

Class	Grade	Class	Grade	Class	Grade
Steer and Heifer...	Prime. Choice. Good. Commercial. Utility. Cutter. Canner.	Cow.....	Good. Commercial. Utility. Cutter. Canner.	Bull and Stag...	Choice. Good. Commercial. Utility. Cutter. Canner.

SPECIFICATIONS FOR OFFICIAL UNITED STATES STANDARDS FOR GRADES OF CARCASS BEEF (STEER, HEIFER, AND COW)

PRIME

Prime grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts shall be very blocky and compact. Extremely thick fleshing throughout is an essential requirement for this grade. Loins and ribs shall be very thick and full. The rounds shall be very plump and the plumpness shall extend well down toward the hock joints. Chucks shall be very short and thick, and the neck and shanks shall be very short. The fat covering shall be smooth and proportionately uniform, and shall extend over the entire exterior surface of the carcass. The interior fat shall be abundant in the pelvic cavity and over the kidney. The protrusion of fat between the chine bones shall be liberal and the "overflow" of fat over the inside of the ribs shall be abundant and evenly distributed. The intermingling of fat with the lean meat in evidence between the ribs, called feathering, shall be very extensive. Both the interior and the exterior fat shall be firm, brittle, somewhat waxy, and of a white or creamy white color. The cut surface of the lean muscle shall be very firm, and possess a smooth velvety appearance. It shall be extensively and uniformly marbled. The color shall be uniform and bright and may range from a pale red to a deep blood red. The bones shall be relatively soft and red, terminating in soft pearly white cartilages.

Only beef produced from beef-type cattle that show an exceptionally high degree of perfection in breeding and feeding will qualify for this grade. Beef produced from either steers or heifers may qualify for the Prime grade. Beef produced from cows is not eligible for this grade.

CHOICE

Choice grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts shall be relatively blocky and compact and thickly fleshed throughout. Loins and ribs shall be thick and full. The rounds shall be plump. The chucks shall be short and thick, and the neck and shanks short. The fat covering shall be fairly smooth and uniform, and shall extend over the entire exterior surface of the carcass. The interior fat shall be abundant in the pelvic cavity and over the kidney. The protrusion of fat between the chine bones shall be fairly liberal and the "overflow" of fat over the inside of the ribs shall be distinctly in evidence and fairly evenly distributed. The intermingling of fat with the lean in evidence between the ribs, called feathering, shall be extensive. Both the interior and the exterior fat shall be firm, brittle, and somewhat waxy, but may be slightly wavy or rough. The fat is usually white or creamy white but a slight yellowish tinge will not exclude beef from this grade, provided the character of the fat meets the requirements for the grade in other respects. The cut surface of the lean muscle shall be firm and possess a smooth velvety appearance. It shall be well marbled and the marbling shall be relatively extensive, especially in the heavier carcasses. The color shall be uniform and bright and may range from a pale red to a deep blood red. The bones are usually soft and red, terminating in soft pearly white cartilages but some ossification of the cartilages and hardening in the bone as indicated by a tinge of whiteness will not disqualify beef produced from mature cattle from this grade.

Only beef produced from beef-type steers and heifers that show a relatively high degree of perfection in breeding and feeding will qualify for the Choice grade. Beef produced from cows is not eligible for this grade.

GOOD

Good grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts shall be moderately blocky and compact and shall be moderately thick-fleshed throughout. A tendency for the loins and ribs to be slightly flat and for the rounds to be slightly flat and to taper toward the shank is permitted. Chucks and neck may be only moderately short and thick and shanks may be only moderately short. The fat covering shall extend well over the exterior surface but may show a moderate degree of waste or patchiness, particularly in heavy mature beef. The interior fat shall be fairly plentiful in the pelvic cavity and around the kidney. There is usually a slight protrusion of fat between the chine bones. The "overflow" of fat over

the inside of the ribs may be apparent to a slight extent. A limited amount of intermingling of fat with the lean between the ribs, called feathering, shall be in evidence. Both the interior and the exterior fat are usually fairly firm and brittle. The quantity of fat required of beef within this grade will vary within relatively wide limits dependent upon the age and class of cattle from which it is produced. That produced from lightweight steers and heifers which were slaughtered when relatively young may have a relatively thin exterior fat covering and only a moderate quantity of interior fat, whereas that produced from heavier, older cattle may possess a relatively thick exterior fat covering and fairly heavy interior fat deposits in the pelvic cavity, over the kidney, and on the inside of the forequarters. The fat is usually creamy white but it may possess a distinctly yellowish tinge. The cut surface of the lean muscle may be only moderately firm and smooth and velvety in appearance. Beef within this grade will show a relatively wide range of marbling. That produced from young cattle may show only a limited degree of marbling which is apparent only in the thicker cuts, whereas that produced from the older, more mature cattle, shall show rather extensive marbling throughout. The color is usually uniform and bright but may be slightly two-toned or slightly shady. It usually ranges from a light red to a slightly dark red. The bone will range from soft and red in lightweight beef produced from young cattle to a relatively hard bone that is tinged with white in the beef produced from older, more mature cattle. It is, however, necessary that the chine bones show cartilages, termed "buttons," in order to qualify for this grade.

Beef produced from steers, heifers, and relatively young well-finished beef-type cows may qualify for the Good grade.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts may be somewhat rangy, angular, and irregular in conformation and the fleshing may be slightly thin throughout. Loins and ribs tend to be flat and somewhat thinly fleshed. The rounds are relatively long, flat, and tapering. Chucks are usually slightly flat and thinly fleshed. The neck is somewhat long and thin and the shanks somewhat long and tapering. The quantity of fat required of beef within this grade will vary within wide limits dependent upon the age and class of cattle from which it is produced. That produced from relatively young lightweight steers and heifers that were slaughtered when relatively young may have a thin exterior fat covering that does not extend over the round or chucks and a relatively small quantity of interior fat. In such beef there will be practically no protrusion of fat between the chine bones and there will be no "overflow" of fat on the inside of the ribs and no feathering between the ribs. Beef produced from heavier, older cattle, and particularly from mature animals, will possess a moderately thick exterior fat covering that may be uneven and wasty, and fairly heavy interior fat deposits in the pelvic cavity, over the kidney, and on the inside of the forequarters. The fat may be slightly yellow, somewhat soft, and slightly oily. The cut surface of the lean muscle may be somewhat soft and watery in beef produced from younger cattle, but in that produced from older cattle it is usually firm but is also usually coarse. Beef within this grade produced from yearling cattle will have little if any marbling, whereas that produced from mature cattle, and particularly cows, will show a moderate degree of marbling through the thicker cuts. The color may be two-toned or shady and usually ranges from a light red to a dark red. The character of the bone will vary from fairly soft and red in the beef produced from the young cattle to white and hard in that produced from mature cattle.

Beef produced from steers, heifers, and cows may qualify for the Commercial grade.

UTILITY

Utility grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts may be decidedly rangy, angular, and irregular in conformation. The fleshing is usually thin. The loins and ribs are flat and thinly fleshed. The rounds are long, flat, and tapering. The chucks are flat and thinly fleshed. The neck and shanks are long and tapering. The hip and shoulder joints are prominent. The degree of fat covering varies from very thin in beef produced from young steers and heifers to a slightly thick covering that may be somewhat uneven in beef produced from cattle that

are more or less advanced in age. The quantity of interior fat varies from very little in beef that is produced from young and immature steers and heifers to a moderate quantity in that produced from mature cattle. The fat is usually soft and varies in color from a grayish white to decidedly yellow. The cut surface of the lean muscle is usually soft and watery in the beef produced from younger cattle but in that produced from more mature cattle it is usually fairly firm but coarse. The beef in this grade will show practically no marbling except in that produced from aged cattle, which may show a little marbling in the thicker cuts. The color may be two-toned or shady and usually ranges from a light red to a very dark red. The bone is usually hard and white.

The Utility grade of beef may be produced from steers, heifers, or cows.

CUTTER

Cutter grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts may be very rangy, angular, and irregular in conformation and very thinly fleshed throughout. The loins and ribs are very flat, thin, and shallow. The rounds are very long, flat, and tapering. The chucks are very flat, thin, and shallow. The neck and shanks are very long and tapering. The hip and shoulder joints are very prominent. The degree of exterior fat covering may vary from a very thin covering that is confined almost entirely to the ribs and loins in the beef produced from younger cattle to a thin, more extensive covering in the beef produced from mature cattle. The interior fat is confined largely to the pelvic cavity and the kidney and may vary from a very small quantity, if any, in these parts in beef produced from younger cattle to a limited quantity in that produced from mature cattle. The color of both the interior and the exterior fat may vary from grayish white to a deep yellow. The cut surface of the lean muscle shows no marbling, is coarse, and is usually soft and watery. The color may be two-toned or shady and usually ranges from a slightly dark red to a very dark red. The bone is usually hard and white.

The Cutter grade of beef may be produced from steers, heifers, and cows. That produced from cows constitutes a relatively large percentage of the beef eligible for this grade.

CANNER

Canner grade beef carcasses and wholesale cuts shall be extremely rangy, angular, and irregular in conformation and extremely thinly fleshed throughout. All cuts are extremely thinly fleshed. Loins and ribs are extremely thin, flat, and shallow. The rounds are very long, flat, and tapering, and the chucks are extremely thin, flat, and shallow. The neck and shanks are extremely long and the hips and shoulder joints are extremely tapering. Beef of this grade is practically devoid of both interior and exterior fat. The outside surface usually has a very dark appearance. The cut surface of the lean muscle is usually coarse and is soft and watery in appearance. It shows no marbling. The color may be two-toned or shady and usually ranges from a moderately dark red to an extremely dark red or brownish black. The bones are nearly always hard and white.

A very large percentage of the beef of the canner grade is produced from mature cows that are somewhat advanced in age.

GRADES OF BULL BEEF CARCASSES

There are six grades of bull carcasses: Choice, Good, Commercial, Utility, Cutter, and Canner.

CHOICE

Choice grade bull beef carcasses have excellent quality, finish, and conformation for the class. Rounds, chucks, and neck are thick and are very heavily muscled. Loins and ribs are broad but tend to shallowness and are relatively small in proportion to the rest of the carcass. The exterior surface is well covered with fat which, although rough, is not gobby or excessively deep at any point. Interior fats are plentiful but are somewhat lacking in firmness and brittleness. Usually such carcasses are derived from young, well-fed bulls, although sometimes carcasses of older bulls meet the requirements of this grade. The flesh generally is of a medium dark red color, firm but comparatively dry.

GOOD

Good grade bull beef carcasses have good quality, finish, and conformation for the class. Rounds, chucks, and neck are thick and heavily muscled. Loins and ribs are relatively small in proportion to the rest of the carcass and are somewhat flat. The general outline is somewhat rough and irregular. Except for the shanks, neck, lower rounds, and shoulders, exterior surfaces generally are covered with a rough but relatively thin layer of fat. Interior fats are in moderate supply. All fats are somewhat soft and may be slightly oily. Flesh generally is medium dark red in color, moderately firm, and dry.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial grade bull beef carcasses possess average quality, finish, and conformation for the class. Rounds, chucks, and neck are thick and full. Loins are relatively thin and flat or sunken. Ribs are moderately thin. Exterior fats are scant and unevenly distributed and generally appear only in spots over the back and rump. Interior fats are likewise scant, with small quantities in the crotch and around the kidneys. The flesh is moderately firm, but usually very dry. Its color varies from dark red to light brown.

UTILITY

Utility grade bull beef carcasses, although fairly well developed in the rounds and chucks, are deficient in these respects as compared with the higher grades. Such a carcass generally is rough in conformation. Loins are very thin or sunken and ribs are flat and thin. Exterior fats generally are lacking, although small quantities may be found on the back and rump. As a rule, interior fats are absent, although slight traces may be found around the kidneys. The flesh is dry and very dark.

CUTTER

Cutter grade bull beef carcasses have poor quality and conformation with practically no visible finish. The general outlines are very uneven. Loins and ribs are very flat and thin. Hip and shoulder bones and ribs are very prominent. Generally there are no exterior or interior fats. Flesh, though relatively dry, is inclined to be soft. Its color is dark red to light brown.

CANNER

Canner grade bull beef carcasses have extremely poor quality and conformation. Visible finish is generally absent. A carcass of this grade is extremely thin in all parts. Rounds and chucks are thin; loins and ribs are very thin and flat or sunken. There are no exterior or interior fats. Flesh is soft and dark.

GRADES OF STAG BEEF CARCASSES

There are six grades of stag beef carcasses: Choice, Good, Commercial, Utility, Cutter, and Canner.

CHOICE

Choice grade stag beef carcasses have excellent quality, finish, and conformation for the class. Rounds are thick, full, and bulging. Loins and ribs are moderately thick, and chucks are thick and heavily fleshed. Necks are moderately short and thick. The exterior fat covering of the carcass, although slightly rough, generally extends well over the carcass. Interior fats are plentiful in the crotch and on the breast, and the kidneys, as a rule, are well covered. Flesh is firm and fine grained for the class and shows some intermixture of fat along the muscle seams. Its color varies from medium to dark red.

GOOD

Good grade stag beef carcasses have good quality, finish, and conformation for the class. Rounds are moderately thick and full; loins and ribs are fairly well proportioned and have moderate depth of flesh. Chucks are thick and necks are moderately thick and short. Except on shanks; neck, lower rounds, and shoulders, a carcass of this grade is fairly well covered with a thin layer of fat. Interior fats generally are in moderate supply but may be slightly deficient. The flesh is firm, moderately fine grained, and varies from medium to dark red in color.

COMMERCIAL

Commercial grade stag beef carcasses have fair quality, finish, and conformation. Rounds, although somewhat full and thick, are inclined to be tapering. Loins are flat and ribs are somewhat thin. Chucks are broad and relatively thin. Exterior fats are unevenly distributed and generally appear as a thin layer over the back and in thin patches on the rump and shoulders. Interior fats are somewhat scant and kidneys are generally only partially covered. The flesh is usually slightly soft and moist. Its color varies from medium to dark red.

UTILITY

Utility grade stag beef carcasses have poor quality, finish, and conformation. Rounds are thin and tapering. Loins are thin, flat, or slightly sunken. Ribs are thin and chucks are broad and thin. Both exterior and interior fats are scant. Thin patches of fat are usually found along the back and on the shoulders. Small quantities usually are found in the crotch and around the kidneys. Flesh is soft, moist, and dark colored.

CUTTER

Cutter grade stag beef carcasses are decidedly deficient in quality, finish, and conformation. Rounds are thin, long, and tapering. Loins are very flat or sunken, and ribs are flat and very thin. Chucks and plates are broad and thin. All bones are prominent because of deficient flesh and fat covering. Except for very small patches along the back and around the kidneys, visible fats are absent. The flesh is soft, watery, and dark colored. This grade is seldom found on the markets.

CANNER

Canner grade stag beef carcasses are extremely deficient in quality, finish, and conformation. All bones are very prominent. Rounds are extremely thin and sharply tapering. Loins are also extremely thin and dished or sunken. Ribs, chucks, and plates are very thin. No visible exterior or interior fats are present. The flesh is dark, soft, and watery. This grade is rarely found on the markets.

